

The Four Core Principles of PAL-STEP

Positive Youth Development: Positive Youth Development is a deliberate process by which youth are engaged in supportive relationships which enable them to develop the living skills and knowledge to maintain their emotional health needed to function on their own. Positive youth development requires not only a supportive environment, but also opportunities for leadership and the development of life skills. Foster youth who approach independence need a support system, formed deliberately and intentionally, based upon a thorough assessment of the adolescent, an assessment that is grounded in developmental theory and an understanding of the challenges of achieving self-sufficiency. A core component of positive youth development and an appreciation of adolescent development indicate youth need to be involved in decision making for their futures. Engaging youth as planners for their own lives is important because it embraces their ability to make decisions and affirms their capacity for self-sufficiency.

Collaboration: Collaboration helps to ensure that a full array of services is available to the youth during and after their transition from foster care. Child welfare supervisors need to acknowledge youth, at least in the short-term, move from *dependent* to *interdependent* living rather than to *independent* living. An important aspect of living interdependently is the assistance needed from collaborators who are committed to the functioning, well-being and needs of youth, and may include foster parents, community agencies and persons with whom the youth feels connected. Establishing collaborative relationships early, while the youth is still in care, can help make the transition more successful since supports will already be in place.

Cultural Responsiveness: Attention to cultural issues permeates all areas of this project to ensure that youth feel protected in their environments. Understanding and respecting culture is essential to developing a training curriculum so youth are provided culturally and developmentally appropriate interventions and support systems to promote their independence. Beyond the ethnic cultures, this project also explored other culturally relevant issues that impact the successful transition to independent living. They viewed adolescence as a culture and included curriculum content on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered youth as well.

Permanent Connections: Youth need permanent connections, whether formal or informal, to ground them in a community and to provide them with support. Foster youth often lack both an emotional and a physical place to return to in times of need. It is important to assist youth who may age out of care and those who have already exited care, to establish such connections. Supervisors can help caseworkers talk with foster parents and caregivers prior to the youth exiting care to determine whether they are willing to be available to the youth. Other possible connections the youth may have should also be explored, including family members, friends, and community agencies that may serve as a resource. The task of finding, establishing, and in some cases mending, connections for youth in care and after they have left care is paramount to their successful transition to adulthood.